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... Fast'

JFK Papers: 'Get Everyone

New FBI Data Details Effort to Check Nearly Every Lead, No Matter How Bizarre

By Jeremiah O'Leary and James R. Dickenson
Washington Star Staff Writers

Documents released today show the FBI involved within hours after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in an intense investigation that included checking out bizarre tips from citizens and close scrutiny of individuals already regarded as radical by the agency.

One of the documents was a message labeled "urgent" from James Walsh, otherwise unidentified, on Department of Justice communictions section letterhead.

Written less than one hour after the shooting on Nov. 22, 1963, it read: "Get everyone involved in shooting the president and get them fast."

The 40,000 documents were made public today by the FBI under the Freedom of Information Act.

AN URGENT Teletype message from FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover to all FBI offices instructed agents to "immediately establish whereabouts of bombing suspects, all known Klan and hate group members, known racial extremists and any other individuals who on the basis of information available in your files may possibly have been involved."

And less than four hours after Kennedy was assassinated during a motorcade in Dallas, Tex. — and two hours after the arrest of Lee Harvey Oswald — Hoover told Washington officials that Oswald "very probably" was the killer.

Hoover said he would classify Oswald "in the category of a nut and the extremist pro-Castro crowd."

Presumed guilt, n solution

Several weeks after the assassination Hoover still had not rejected the possibility that Oswald had acted in concert with others or at the instructions of a foreign power.

In a memo to the FBI's top echelon, dated Dec. 12, 1963, Hoover wrote:

". . . We have several letters, not in the report (to the Warren Commission), because we were not able to prove it, written to him (Oswald) from Cuba referring to the job he was going to do, his good marksmanship and stating when it was all over

letters known to be fake immediately

Did he ask CIA?

he would be brought back to Cuba and presented to the chief."

BUT HOOVER'S memo said, "We do not know if the chief was (Fidel) Castro and cannot make an investigation because we have no intelligence operation in Cuba.

"I personally believe Oswald was the assassin," he wrote, but he said he was greatly concerned as to "whether he was the only man."

Hoover told his aides the Justice Department wanted to issue a statement saying Oswald was the assassin; there were "no foreign or subversive elements involved in the killing; and there was no connection betweeen Oswald and Jack Ruby who shot him dead two days after the assassination.

"I flatly disagreed," Hoover said, and new President Lyndon B. Johnson agreed with him no conclusions ought to be drawn at that time.

Hoover telephoned Attorney General Robert Kennedy less than 15 minutes after the shooting. It was the first the attorney general heard of his brother's assassination.

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In a memo from Hoover to FBI officials, relating his 1:45 p.m. EST telephone conversation with Kennedy, Hoover said Kennedy asked that the FBI "do whatever we could" in connection with the shooting. . . .

At 2:10 p.m., Hoover said he again telephoned Kennedy to tell him the president was "in very, very critical condition. The attorney general then told me the president had died."

THE FBI FILES indicate that the bureau tracked down every lead, however remote, from people who overheard conversations in which people predicted the president would be assassinated if he went to Texas, or expressed anti-Kennedy sentiments. Many of these conversations were the result of people's concern about the right-wing and anti-Kennedy sentiment in Texas.

The FBI also checked out anyone who talked or asked about guns, such as a man in a service station near Dallas who asked another customer where he could get a silencer or a high-powered rifle.

The bureau also investigated statements by waitresses and service station attendants and others who felt they had seen people resembling Oswald or his wife or mother in the days and weeks before the assassination.

The FBI got a number of tips from people who dealt with psychics. One woman in Quebec wrote Hoover informing him that her mind reader had had a vision of Oswald visiting Ruby in Ruby's Dallas strip joint and that therefore she was convinced there was a connection between the two of them.

Some people such as waitresses reported overhearing men boast of having won bets as much as $5,000 or $8,000 that Kennedy would never finish the parade in Dallas alive. Many of the statements about the killing were made by people who were drunk.

A CALLER on Dec. 9 from Logan, Utah, urged that Hoover be immediately informed "that President Kennedy was not dead, and the apparent assassination was a gigantic hoax engineered by the FBI to trap the Mafia."

One man called the FBI and said he had stopped at a gas station in Scottsdale, Ariz., six months after the assassination and in a telephone book in a phone booth he found "John Wilks Booth" and "John F. Kennedy" written on the front page. The middle name of the killer of Abraham Lincoln had been spelled incorrectly.

After questioning the owner of the gas station and others, the FBI concluded "no one had noticed any questionable persons in the telephone booth."

Five days after the assassination American Nazi Party commander George Lincoln Rockwell sent the FBI a list of 27 names associated with his extremist organization as persons "to keep a careful watch on."

Denouncing the slaying in a letter to Hoover, Rockwell conceded that his "extreme political movement attracts irresponsible and lunatic elements who are not welcome, but who force themselves upon the movement and are very hard to get rid of."

Other documents portrayed the FBI as being wary and truculent in its dealings with the CIA during this period. At one stage, an assistant to Assistant FBI Director William Sullivan wrote a memo saying the only way to deal with CIA agents was to treat them firmly for the best protection of the FBI's interests.

A DAY AFTER Oswald was killed by Ruby, Hoover sent three basic questions to the Dallas field office. He ordered them to find out: if anyone had been conspiring with Ruby to accomplish Oswald's death; to find out Ruby's motive for killing Oswald; and to discover if any police officers or persons operating under the cover of the law "willfully permitted Oswald to be shot."

The investigation basically became an intense exploration into the lives of both Oswald, the ex-Marine who once lived in the Soviet Union, and the Chicago-born Ruby who lived on the fringes of society as a gambler and proprietor of sleazy nightclubs.

Early messages ordered background checks of everyone of Ruby's relations and to discover particularly if there ever had been mental illness in his family. Within two days agents in Chicago reported one acquaintance thought Ruby might have been shellshocked during World War II while he was in the Army Air Corps but in short order other agents found that there was no substance to reports that Ruby had a plate in his head to account for his emotional behavior.

WITHIN 24 hours after Oswald was shot, Hoover informed the Dallas office that it was checking the State Department and CIA for any records of a Ruby trip to Havana, Cuba. It was learned that Ruby had gone to Havana in September, 1959 — nine months after Fidel Castro took power — for one week, ostensibly to visit the manager of a casino. A woman named Elaine Mignier from San Francisco, told agents she had taken a message in code from Ruby to gambler Lewis McWillie prior to the visit. But first inspection of the FBI records did not disclose the results of this phase of the probe.

Special Agent In Charge at Dallas Gordon Shanklin told Hoover by the night of Nov. 24 that Ruby said no one else was involved in his killing of Oswald and that no one knew what he was going to do.

Officials emphasized that the FBI files contain all sorts of reports, with various levels of accuracy or lack of it, about the Kennedy assassination. They said the material is the raw data that flows into the hands of investigators at every stage of an investigation and that much of the material is uncorroborated or single-source information.

This raw information is said to include numerous rumors and unverified reports as well as information that was checked out and became part of the official Warren Commission report.

THE FBI HAS eliminated the names of any witnesses or informants whose identities they think must be kept secret, as is often done to protect persons named in CIA and FBI documents being made public.

Some officials said they hoped release of the documents would help put an end to speculations about unproven conspiracies in connection with Kennedy's murder. Others acknowledged that the nature of the documents, sometimes unchecked and often unverifiable, is more likely to set off a new wave of conspiracy theories rather than to dispose of them.

"This is the raw, unchecked stuff, just as we got it at the time of the president's murder 14 years ago," one official said. "Most of the documents aren't going to show you anything you haven't heard or read before. And some of it is probably pretty far-fetched, but it's all there so people can see what we had to wade through when we were not on the case."